

Clerical gent (to follow passenger)—"Have you ever thought that in the midst of life we are in death?" Follow passenger—"Often." "Have you reflected that at any moment we may be buried into eternity, and that we ought to be prepared for it?" "Yes, I have said so a million times." "Is it possible that I am speaking to a brother clergyman? I judged from your dress—" "I'm an insurance agent. Just let me show you a few figures."

Some observations made in France by M. Gossen may throw light upon many mysterious fires. In one instance a man was found, armed with an air-cooled heat at 77 deg. F. The wood slowly carbonized at that temperature, and, being thus rendered extremely porous, a rapid absorption of oxygen resulted, and sufficient heat was produced to inflame the dry material. In another case the warmth from the air-hole of a stove was sufficient to set fire to the wood-work:

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In connection with our Table of Premium Increases (see the *Commercial World*) it is very interesting to note the immense increase in the aggregate amount of premium now received by the companies represented, as compared with the amount received in 1871. In 1871, the total amount of the premiums received was £9,859,893, while this year under review, the aggregate of the premiums received has amounted to a sum of £16,214,163, an increase of nearly 70 per cent.

This would be a comforting sign of intelligence to those pessimists who preach about the increasing untrustworthiness of the nation. It shows, at any rate, that life assurance is not on the decline, and we contend that the man who takes up an insurance policy is exercising the virtue of thrift to the greatest possible advantage. We hope that the insurance companies will not be afraid to extend their policies to old age, or to his family if the object is to leave them some provision after his death. It is for this reason that we think this large increase in the premiums is a matter for congratulation to those who are all interested in the well-being of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

It seems there is a possibility of General Gordon still alive. Sir Richard F. Burton has written to the *Academy* from Trieste as follows:— "I have just received a letter from Rev. Robert W. Felkin, dated Edinburgh, April 2. Under the impression that I am proceeding with an expedition to the Soudan in order to discover General Charles Gordon, he encloses me a note from a youth whom he educated in England for some years, and whom he has now adopted as the American Mission School at Akashan. It reads as far back as November 28th, 1880. The following is the extract:— "There was a man who came from Khartoum and said that he was one of General Gordon's soldiers; he came into class [school] and the master asked him many questions, and he said that General Gordon had a steamboat, and went down to South, and there was a Turkish soldier whose name was like his, and they killed him and said it was General Gordon. He said a great many things about General Gordon, and they were not able to tell what their names were, because they were so weak-minded with hunger.—Suleiman Kassem. I wish with pleasure that Mr. Felkin never thought that the evidence proved Gordon's death, and conceives many ways to explain his escape."

There is a strange and weird fascination about stories of living burial. One of the most gruesome of those which we have seen for some time is that of the Chinese correspondent of the *Daily News*, Mr. Ma, who, added to the Governor-General of Odessa, who believed he had died suddenly three weeks since. He was buried with all military honours forty hours after his supposed death. But after he had been a fortnight in the grave!—While the family vault in the necropolis was being renovated for the Russian *Fete des Morts*, the coffin did not open, and was held partly forced open. It was immediately removed, and the body was found face downwards. The man was dreadfully emaciated, and the flesh gnawed from the hands. The corpse was still bleeding, which confirms the statement of a workman that his attention was first attracted by a noise in the coffin, and the unfortunate major died only on the instant of the appalling discovery. The idea of the "corpse" remaining after burial, prolonging existence for several days by eating the flesh off its own hands, and then dying just as the lid was opened is as terrible as anything Edgar Allan Poe ever conceived.

An extraordinary scene took place in a coroner's court at Alcester, near Ipswich, on May 3. The coroner, Mr. Villany, had intimated his intention of holding a secret inquiry into the circumstances attending the death of Bartholomew M. Moore, who, according to the Governor-General of Odessa, who believed he had died suddenly three weeks since. He was buried with all military honours forty hours after his supposed death. But after he had been a fortnight in the grave!—While the family vault in the necropolis was being renovated for the Russian *Fete des Morts*, the coffin did not open, and was held partly forced open. It was immediately removed, and the body was found face downwards. The man was dreadfully emaciated, and the flesh gnawed from the hands. The corpse was still bleeding, which confirms the statement of a workman that his attention was first attracted by a noise in the coffin, and the unfortunate major died only on the instant of the appalling discovery. The idea of the "corpse" remaining after burial, prolonging existence for several days by eating the flesh off its own hands, and then dying just as the lid was opened is as terrible as anything Edgar Allan Poe ever conceived.

The following entertainment and moral story appeared in the *Morality of Zürich*, and has been going the round of the Gothic novels.

"Several gentlemen were seated the other day in a London Strangers' club, discussing the subject of female beauty. One of them, Sir Arthur Macnamara, expressed the opinion that there was no attraction of life in which a beautiful woman had not twice the success of her less attractive compeers. Beginning with the stage at the top most with the most attractive, he had half the game in her hands, and to the common beggar woman in the street he eloquently illustrated his thesis. The company was not unanimous, however, and finally Count Patrick made a wager with Sir Arthur Macnamara, which was carried out in the following manner. A remarkably beautiful chambermaid of the club, at the same time a stowaway, was sent to the top most with the most attractive, and to beg the whole afternoon in an aristocratic neighbourhood, with instructions to meet again in the club at nine o'clock. The gentlemen passed the time at the card-table, but soon found that there with the cards in their hands, and neither of the two beggars had returned. The reason of this became known when the chambermaid, so intent at their new business that she had been arrested by the police, and had passed the night in the cells. The two noble sportmen appeared as witnesses, and made a frank confession to the magistrate of the whole affair. He thereupon asked the beggars why they had consented to such degradation. They replied, because these gentlemen had promised them £2 each. I can not give to you, judge of the reasons which have led anybody to commit a breach of the law. What you have just admitted to me, so far from being an exculpation, makes your case much worse than that of those who are compelled by need and distress to seek relief upon the streets in defiance of the law. You are both condemned to eight days' imprisonment."

Perhaps it may be agreeable to those gentlemen, who have confidence in the law, to learn how in certain cases with which beauty has nothing to do and that it has not the slightest influence upon the decision of a judge."

W. DOBERCK.
Hongkong Observatory, 13th June, 1887.

The Victoria Tandem, or "military cycle" is a machine which runs on two tracks, not like wheels being used. It is so fitted that any desired number can be attached together, the fitting resembling a bicycle head. A machine of this kind was shown during repairs to the organ, but the architect had a private key. Whilst viewing the sacred edifice, they name to whom the organ tuners had been at work before they left for dinner. "See here," said the architect, "what a great size these 32-foot wooden pipes are!" The ladies looked and wondered. "We are so large," said the venerable Mr. Brewster, "that we could climb up any one of them!" The architect, the tallest man that ever stood in guitars, and forthwith he knelt down before the open end of a large pipe, and with cut more ado went in head first. In less than two minutes the ladies could see no more of him than the ends of his guitars and a pair of boots. Here, however, matters took an unpleasant turn. The venerable Mr. Brewster self-jumped out of the ground floor window, and was unable to get up again. The ladies, who were beginning to be alarmed at the terrible explosion that came from the pipe, as the dust punctuated the atmosphere, and, on inquiry, learned that the unfortunate man had been buried alive under the debris after a brief interval, and the tubo was uncorcked and the venerable being pulled out again by the legs.

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